

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00
USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 TRSE-00
DHA-02 ACDA-07 /078 W
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O R 191305Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0684
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC HAWAII
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCNSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 0906

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT - PARA 3)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: MRS GANDHI CALLS FOR A "SNAP POLL"

REF: A. NEW DELHI 773 B. NEW DELHI 848 (NOTAL)

1. IN A NATION-WIDE RADIO BROADCAST ON THE EVENING
OF JAN 18, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI ANNOUNCED THAT THE
LOK SABHA WAS TO BE DISSOLVED AND ELECTIONS HELD IN
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MARCH. ELECTIONS WILL BE FOR THE 542 SEATS IN THE OK
SABHA. THIS REPRESENTS AN INCREASE OF 19 OVER THE
CURRENT 523 SEAT LOK SABHA, THE RESULT OF ELECTION
DISTRICT REDEMARCTION AND POPULATION INCREASES SINCE
1971. THERE ARE ALSO TWO NOMINATED ANGLO-INDIAN MEMBERS
OF THE HOUSE.

2. MRS GANDHI OPENED HER BRIEF (10 MINUTE) SPEECH WITH A JUSTIFICATION FOR IMPOSING THE EMERGENCY 19 MONTHS AGO THE COUNTRY HAD BEEN ON THE BRINK OF DISASTER AND THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO ACT FIRMLY IN ORDER THAT INDIA WOULD SURVIVE. SHE HAD EMPHASIZED AT THAT TIME THAT THE EMERGENCY WOULD BE TEMPORARY, AND IN FACT THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED HAVE GRADUALLY BEEN RELACED. PARTY LEADERS AND WORKERS HAVE BEEN RELEASED AND PRESS CENSORSHIP HAS BEEN EASED. SHE OBSERVED THAT IN HER TRAVELS AROUND THE COUNTRY SHE HAD BEEN PLEASED TO DISCOVER A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND STRENGTH AMONG THE PEOPLE. THE EMERGENCY PRODUCED AN ATMOSPHERE OF DISCIPLINE WHICH HAD ENABLED THE GOVERNMENT TO VIGOROUSLY PURSUE POLICIES FOR THE UPLIFT OF THE WEAKER SECTIONS OF SOCIETY: SHE CITED THE RECENT AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION AND ALSO THE ANTI-DOWRY AND FAMILY PLANNING CAMPAIGNS AS EXAMPLES OF THSE SOCIALLY NECESSARY PROGRAMS WHICH HAD BEEN LAUNCHED. THE PM STATED THAT THE NATION HAD MADEE GREAT STRIDES IN THE PAST 18 MONTHS, PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD. WORK HAD BEEN RESUMED ON MANY DEVELOPMENT PLANS WHICH HAD BEEN INTERRUPTED BY THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POLITICAL DISTURBANCES. INFLATION HAD BEEN CHECKED, PRODUCTION INCREASED, AND GRAIN STOCKS WERE THE LARGEST IN YEARS. THE 20-POINT AND FIVE-POINT PROGRAMS HAVE SHOWN TANGIBLE RESULTS. WHILE CONCEDING THAT FARMERS AND WORKERS WRE EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES AND THAT PRICES OF A "FEW" COMMODITIES HAD "SLIGHTLY" INCREASED, SHE ASSURED HER AUDIENCE THAT THE GOI HAD INITIATED CORRECTIVE STEPS

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WHICH WOULD PRODUCE QUICK RESULTS. AT THE SAME TIME, MRS. GANDHI WARNED THAT THERE COULD BE NO RETURN TO THE CHAOTIC TIMES WHICH PREVAILED BEFORE THE EMERGENCY: "ELEMENTS WHICH RISE TO STIR UP ECONOMIC TROUBLE WILL BE STERNLY DEALT WITH." IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT PEOPLE LIVE BY "CERTAIN CODES AND NORMS OF BEHAVIOR" SO THAT GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING IS NOT OBSTRUCTED.

3. MRS GANDHI SAID THAT SINCE INDIA WAS NOW MORE HEALTHY, EFFICIENT AND DYNAMIC THAN IT HAD BEEN FOR YEARS, THE QUESTION NOW WAS HOW TO RESTORE THE POLITICAL PROCESSES WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD BDVN FORCED TO RESTRICT. INDIA WAS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE GOVERNMENT DERIVES ITS POWER FROM THE PEOPLE, AND THAT EVERY FEW YEARS THE PEOPLE EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS BY A FREE CHOICE OF THEIR GOVERNING LEADERS. EVEN THOUGH LEGALLY THE CURRENT LOK SABHA CAN CONTINUE FOR ANOTHER 15 MONTHS, SHE STATED THAT SHE STRONGLY

BELIEVED THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT "MUST REPORT BACK TO THE PEOPLE AND SEEK SANCTION FROM THEM TO CARRY OUT PROGRAMS AND POLICIES FOR THE NATION'S STRENGTH AND WELFARE." THUS, SHE HAD ASKED THE PRESIDENT O *08 7);3 5#3 043 3,5 9(ABHA AND ORDER FRESH ELECTIONS. THE POLLING IS TO TAKE PLACE IN MARCH. SHE CONCLUDED: "THE RULES OF THE EMERGENCY ARE BEING FURTHER RELAXED TO PERMIT ALL LEGITIMATE ACTIVITY NECESSARY FOR RECOGNIZED PARTIES TO PUT FORTH THEIR POINTS OF VIEW BEFORE THE PEOPLE." THE PM URGED PARTIES TO REFRAIN FROM VIOLENCE AND VILIFICATION. "EVERY ELECTION IS AN ACT OF FAITH, AN OPPORTUNITY TO CLEANSE PUBLIC LIFE OF CONFUSION."

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4. IN ANNOUNCING THAT SHE WAS ASKING FOR THE DISSOLUTION OF THE LOK SABHA THE PM HAS IMPLIED THAT SHE IS NOT PLANNING ON HOLDING STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS AT THE SAME TIME. WE ARE RELIABLY INFORMED THAT AT LEAST KERALA STATE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD AT THE SAME TIME

AS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. NO OTHER STATE ELECTIONS
APPEAR TO BE PLANNED AT THIS TIME.

5. WE ARE TRUCK BY THREE POINTS IN THE PM'S SPEECH:
(A) DESPITE THE STEADILY-INCREASING RUMORS AND SPECULATION IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS, THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTIONS STILL APPEARS TO HAVE COME AS A SURPRISE TO MOST INDIANS. CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROOAH WAS

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SUDDENLY FORCED TO CANCEL A TRIP TO MANIPUR, TAMIL NADU AND KERALA WHICH AS TO BEGIN TODAY. FOREIGN MINISTER CHAVAN WAS CAUGHT IN BUCHAREST, ABOUT TO LEAVE FOR PRAGUE, YAND IS NOW REPORTED TO BE RUSHING BACK TO DELHI. ONE CONGRESS MP TOLD AN EMBOFF RIGHT AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE HAD BEEN TALKING TO AN AICC GENERAL SECRETARY THST VERY MORNING WHO PROFESSED TO KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE CHANCES FOR ELECTIONS IN MARCH; AOTHER EARLIER IN THE DAY EXPRESSED DOUBT THERE WOULD BE ELECTIONS. IT THUS APPEARS THAT AS ALWAYS MRS GANDHI HAD KEPT HER THOUGHTS VERY MUCH TO HERSELF.

(B) THE PM CLEAR THAT ALTHOUGH RESTRICTIONS "ARE BEING FURTHER RELAXED," THE EMERGENCY WILL NOT BE LIFTED FOR THE POLL. MOREOVER, TSHE SET FORTH SEVERAL -- LARGELY UNDEFINED -- RULES OF CONDUCT FOR THE CONTESTING OF THE ELECTIONS: IN ORDER THAT GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING NOT BE IMPAIRED, SHE WARNED THAT THERE CAN BE "NO PREACHING OF HATRED, NO PRACTICING OF VIOLENCE, NO ENCOURAGEMENT OF SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES, ANDONO LOWERING OF STANDARDS OF PUBLIC LIFE." AS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES, THE PM COUNSELED THEM TO "ESCHEW VIOLENCE AND REFRAIN FROM VILIFICATION AND CALUMNY. PEOPLE SHOULD NEITHER BELIEVE IN NOR GIVE CURRENCY TO RUMORS AND GOSSIP." MRS GANDHI HAS THUS LAID DOWN A VAGUELY WORDED CODE OF CONDUCT WHICH THE OPPOSITION WILL HAVE TO OBSERVE, AND SHE OF COURSE WILL BE THE SOLE AUTHORITY WHO CAN LATER DEFINE THESE RULES OF THE GAME.

(C) MRS GANDHI EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT INDIA'S IMAGE. IN HER BROADCAST, SHE SAID THAT THERE IS A NEW RESPECT FOR THE COUNTRY ABROAD "DESPITE CRITICISM" AND CALLED UHBN THE PEOPLE TO GO TO THE POLLS WITH THE FIRM RESOLVE "TO UPHOLD THE FAIR NAME OF INDIA AS A

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LAND COMMITTED TO THE PATH OF RECONCILIATION, PEACE
AND PROGRESS."

6. OPPOSITION LEADERS QUICKLY REACTED TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT. THEY GENERALLY WELCOMED THE NEWS BUT UNIFORMLY EMPHASIZED THAT IN ORDER TO BE MEANINGFUL THE ELECTIONS MUST BE "FREE AND FAIR." CONGRESS (O) LEADER MORARJI DESAI, WHO HAD BEEN RELEASED HOURS EARLIER, STATED THAT THE SHORT NOTICE WOULD BE A HANDICAP TO THE OPPOSITION, BUT THIS PROBLEM WOULD BE FACED. SOME LEADERS, SUCH AS THE JAN SANGH'S A.B. VAJPAYEE AND REBEL CONGRESSMAN KRISHNA KANT, CONTENDED THAT ALL LHISA AND DIR DETAINEES MUST BE RELEASED, TMJT ALL GUIDELINES AND RESTRICTIONS ON THE PRESS BE REMOVED, AND THAT ALL CURBS ON PUBLIC MEETINGS BE LIFTED. VAJPAYEE ADDED THAT TRUE TO HER STYLE, THE PM HAS AGAIN GAMBLED, "BUT THIS TIME SHE MIGHT LOSE." ACCORDING TO SAMACHAR (WITH WHICH THE COMMUNISTS HAVE BEEN FEUDING RECENTLY OVER DISTORTED REPORTING), THE CPI WELCOMED THE NEWS WHOLEHEARTEDLY, BUT ALSO URGED THAT THE EMERGENCY BE LIFTED IMMEDIATELY. J.P. NARAYAN HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN ASKED BY OPPOSITION LEADERS TO COME TO DELHI IMMEDIATELY TO ASSIST IN THE CREATION OF A UNITED NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION PARTY. WE PRESUME FROM ALL THIS THAT THE OPPOSITION IS NOT AT THIS TIME ACTIVELY CONSIDERING BOYCOTTING THE ELECTION. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER IT WILL REVIEW THIS OPTION LATER.

7. WE LEARN THAT THE PRESIDENT IS DEFINITELY PRO- CLAIMING THE DISSOLUTION OF THE LOK SABHA SOME TIME TODAQ AM AS OF THIS EVENING THE CURRENT SESSION OYKSTHE LOWER HOUSE WILL BE CONSIDERED TO HAVE BEEN TERMINATED. THE RESULT IS THAT THERE IS NO CHANCE OF HOLDING A SO-CALLED "LAME-DUCK" SESSION OF THE CURRENT LOK SABHA TO APPROVE A "VOTE ON ACCOUNT." SUCH

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A VOTE WOULD ALLOW THE CONTINUED DISBURSEMENT OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS THROUGH THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR (MARCH 31). THIS MEANS THAT THE NEWLY-ELECTED LOK SABHA WILL HAVE TO HAVE A BRIEF SESSION IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ELECTION AND BEFORE MARCH 31 TO PASS THE "VOTE ON ACCINT." LATER ON, PROBABLY IN APRIL-MAY, IT WILL RECONVENE FOR A MORE LENGTHY AND LEISURELY REGULAR BUDGET SESSION TO CONSIDER AND PASS THE BUDGET FOR THE NEW FINANCILA YEAR BEGINNING APRIL 1.

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